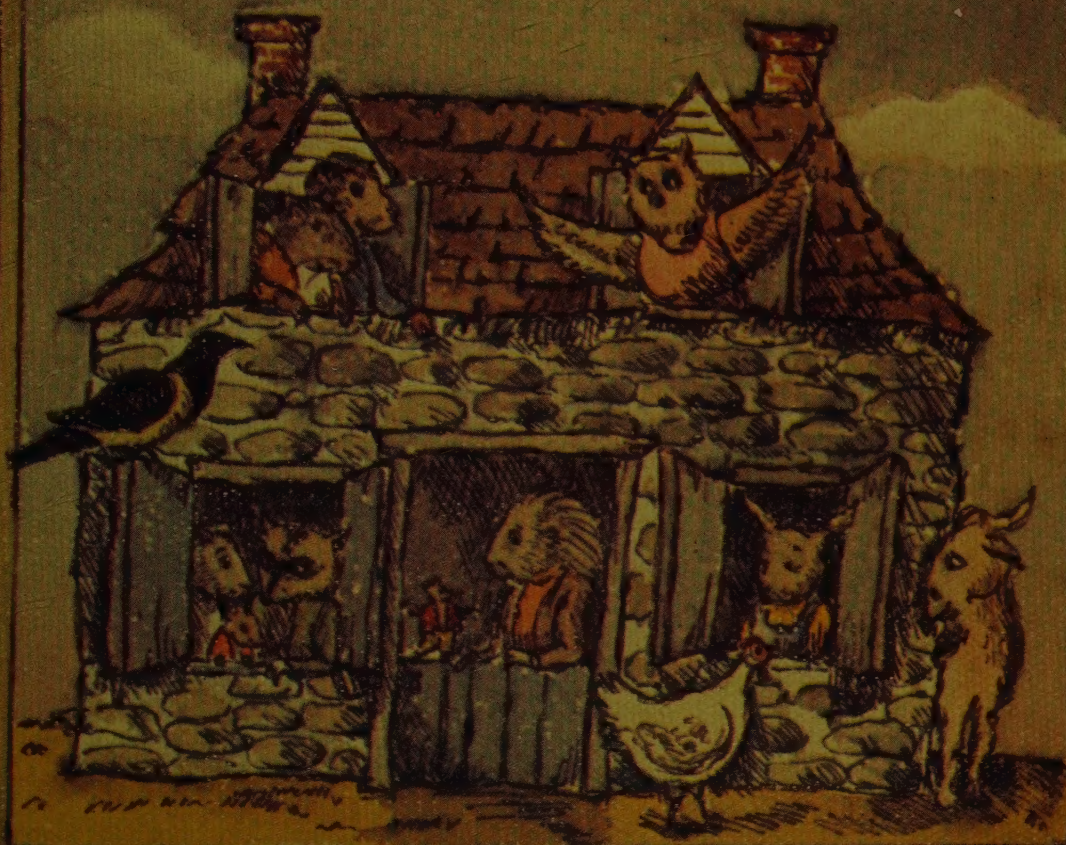


# STONE HOUSE STORIES



by Ben Shecter





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# STONE HOUSE STORIES

Written and Illustrated by  
**Ben Shecter**



**Harper & Row, Publishers**  
**New York, Evanston, San Francisco, London**

## **STONE HOUSE STORIES**

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FIRST EDITION



**To George Zellner**



## Owl's Barn Sale

New leafy branches brushed against the shutters of Owl's house. Owl pulled back the curtains, raised the window, and threw open the shutters. "Well, what do you know!" she cried. "It's spring!"

Sunlight filled the room. Owl's house was a nest of clutter. Cobwebs reached out as if to hold things in place. "Time for a spring cleaning," said Owl. While she was dusting, a shelf full of bric-a-brac fell on her head. "Too many things!" she cried. "I'm going to have a barn sale."

Owl gathered up all the things she thought she didn't want anymore and put them in the barn. Then she put up big BARN SALE signs everywhere.

Gray Fox, out on a spring walk, was the first to come by. "What's for sale?" asked Gray Fox.

"Everything in the barn," said Owl.

Gray Fox picked up a small wooden box. "I'll take this," he said.

Owl looked at the box. She remembered the day her grandfather gave it to her and said, "I made it just for you."

"I can't sell that box," said Owl. "My grandfather made it for me."

Then Gray Fox found a pitcher. "I'll take this pitcher," he said.



Owl held the pitcher and thought about all the pretty flower arrangements that had been in it. "It's my favorite pitcher," she said. "I just can't part with it."



Gray Fox continued to look around the barn. He picked up a clock. "I'll take this clock," he said.

Owl looked at the clock and tried not to think about anything. "Okay, you can have it," she said.

But after Gray Fox left, Owl felt sad about parting with the clock. It was the one she had learned to tell time by.



Gray Fox went to the millhouse and watched the water-wheel turn. Then he looked at his new clock and wound it. Mouse, who was at the mill, saw Gray Fox. "That's a nice clock," said Mouse.

“Thank you,” said Gray Fox.

“Is it for sale?” asked Mouse. “I’ve been invited to Rabbit’s birthday party and I don’t have a present yet.”

Gray Fox held the clock lovingly. “You know, Mouse, this clock belonged to my great-grandmother, and I really hate to part with it.”

“Oh, all right,” said Mouse. “I just thought I’d ask.” Mouse began to walk away.

“Wait a minute,” said Gray Fox. “Since this is for Rabbit’s present, I will sell it to you.”

Then Gray Fox sold Mouse the clock for twice the amount he had paid for it. “Have fun at the party, and give Rabbit my best,” he said.

Mouse wrapped the clock in party paper, and gave it to Rabbit for his birthday. And when Rabbit opened Mouse’s present he said, “Just what I needed—a clock! Thank you, Mouse.”



But he was just being kind. Rabbit already had two clocks. Unable to find the right place for the clock, Rabbit decided to give it away. He gave the clock to the ladies' charity at the country fair.

Raccoon, who was at the fair, won the clock at a game of ring toss. On his way home, Raccoon stopped at the pond for a swim. He left the clock at the pond's edge.



Crow, out fishing, saw the clock and picked it up. "Hmmm, a lost clock," said Crow, and he tucked it under his wing and left the pond.

Crow went to the meadow. The meadow was humming with springtime activity. Animals who hadn't seen each other all winter renewed their friendships, while others were making friends for the first time.

There Crow came across Squirrel and Chipmunk. They were having an argument about who could walk the fastest.

"I'll bet you this clock that I can walk faster than both of you," said Crow.



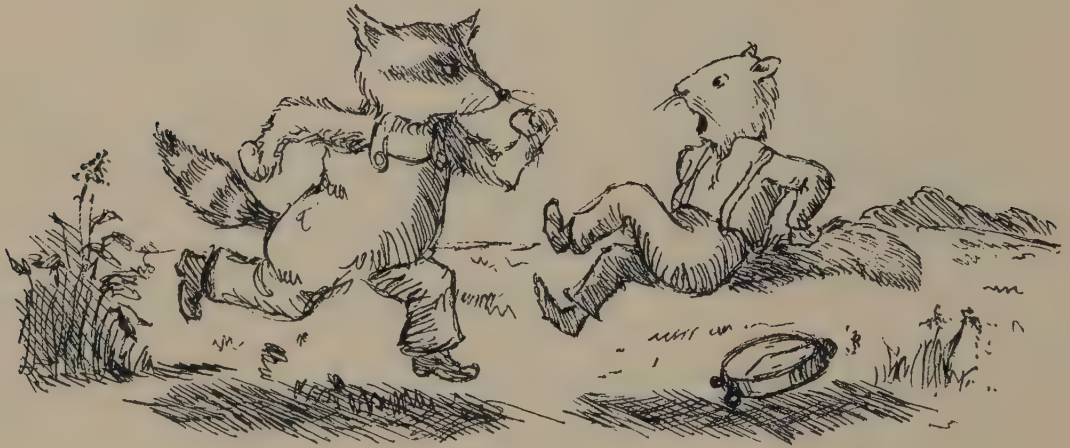
They all agreed to a walking race. Squirrel won and Chipmunk came in second. Crow was an angry third. He grumbled when he handed the clock over to Squirrel, and he flew away.

Raccoon, out searching for his lost prize, saw Squirrel with the clock. "You've got my clock!" he said, trying to get it away from Squirrel.

Squirrel held the clock tightly. "It's *my* clock!" he said.



Squirrel punched Raccoon in the nose, and Raccoon punched Squirrel back. The clock broke!



“Now you two have nothing,” said Chipmunk.

“I’m sorry,” said Squirrel.

“I’m sorry too!” said Raccoon.

They left the meadow, leaving the clock behind.

Later that day, Owl was in the meadow gathering flowers. There, in a patch of forget-me-nots, Owl found her clock. “My clock!” she cried. “I’m so happy to have my clock back.” She held it close to her.

When Owl returned home, she put the clock back on the mantle and made a pretty flower arrangement for the pitcher. "It's more fun keeping things than selling them," she said. Then Owl put up a big sign that said: BARN SALE OVER!



## Barnyard Quarrel

It was the time of summer when the grass was turning brown, and the stream was a muddy footpath.

Chicken and Rabbit sat beneath the butternut tree fanning themselves. "It's so hot my feathers are dragging," said Chicken.

"You can say that again," said Rabbit.

"It's so hot my feathers are really dragging," said Chicken.

"That's not what you said before," said Rabbit.

"It is so," said Chicken.

"No it isn't," said Rabbit.

"Then what *did* I say?" asked Chicken.

"You said, 'It's so hot my feathers are dragging.'"





“That’s what I said I said,” said Chicken.

“No, the second time you said, ‘It’s so hot my feathers are really dragging.’”

“Oh *REALLY!*” said Chicken. “It’s too hot to argue with a dumb bunny like you.”

“Don’t you call me a dumb bunny, you dumb cluck,” said Rabbit.

The summertime quiet was broken by the sound of their argument. Goat heard the quarrel and joined them. "What's going on?" asked Goat.

"He's putting words into my mouth," said Chicken.

"That dumb cluck called me a dumb bunny," said Rabbit.

"Friends shouldn't argue and call each other names," said Goat.

Chicken and Rabbit made faces at each other.

"Why don't you patch things up and take a walk together?" said Goat.



“Never,” said Rabbit.

“Never,” said Chicken.

Goat walked away. Rabbit and Chicken went for walks too, each going a different way. On his walk Rabbit heard cries of help. He found Chicken caught between two trees.

“What are you doing here?” asked Chicken.

“I’m out walking,” said Rabbit. “And what are *you* doing?”

“I’m out walking also,” said Chicken.

“You look like you’re stuck,” said Rabbit.

“I’m walking resting,” said Chicken.

“You look like you’re resting stuck,” said Rabbit.

“It only looks that way,” said Chicken.

“Have a nice rest,” said Rabbit.

He nodded to Chicken and then continued on his walk.  
When Rabbit came back, he passed Chicken again.

“Still resting?” asked Rabbit.

Chicken tried to wriggle.

“Maybe I can help you get *unrested*,” said Rabbit.



Chicken wriggled some more. “All right,” she said, “I have rested long enough.”

“Take a deep breath,” said Rabbit. Then he pushed her from behind. Chicken didn’t move.



“If you want to get unrested, you’d better take a deeper breath,” said Rabbit. Rabbit took a deep breath himself, and pushed Chicken as hard as he could. Chicken and Rabbit went sailing through the air!



“Thank you, Rabbit,” said Chicken. “It’s good to be unrested.”

“How did you get stuck?” asked Rabbit.

“I was looking for rocks,” said Chicken.

“Do you collect rocks?” asked Rabbit.

“Yes,” said Chicken.

“So do I,” said Rabbit.

Chicken and Rabbit walked together for a while. “I apologize,” said Chicken and Rabbit at the same time.

“Let’s go rock-collecting together,” said Rabbit.

“That would be nice,” said Chicken. “Boy, was I stuck,” she added.

“You can say that again,” said Rabbit.



“Boy, was I really stuck,” said Chicken.

“Really?” said Rabbit.

Then they walked along together, laughing and looking for rocks.



## Porcupine's Place to Paint

The wind blew through the maple tree scattering crimson leaves across the gold, russet, and lavender patched meadow. Porcupine stood at the open door.

“What pretty colors,” he said. “I’d like to paint them.”

Porcupine wanted to paint pictures. But every time he tried, his mother said, “Stop painting and have some soup.”



"I'm not hungry," answered Porcupine.

"But you'll be hungry later," said his mother.

"I want to finish my picture," said Porcupine.

"What's more important, painting a picture or eating?" asked his mother.

"Right now, *painting*," said Porcupine. So he gathered up his paints, papers, and brushes, and said, "I'm going to find a place to paint." Porcupine kissed his mother good-bye. "You'll hear from me soon," he said.

"Don't forget to eat," she said.

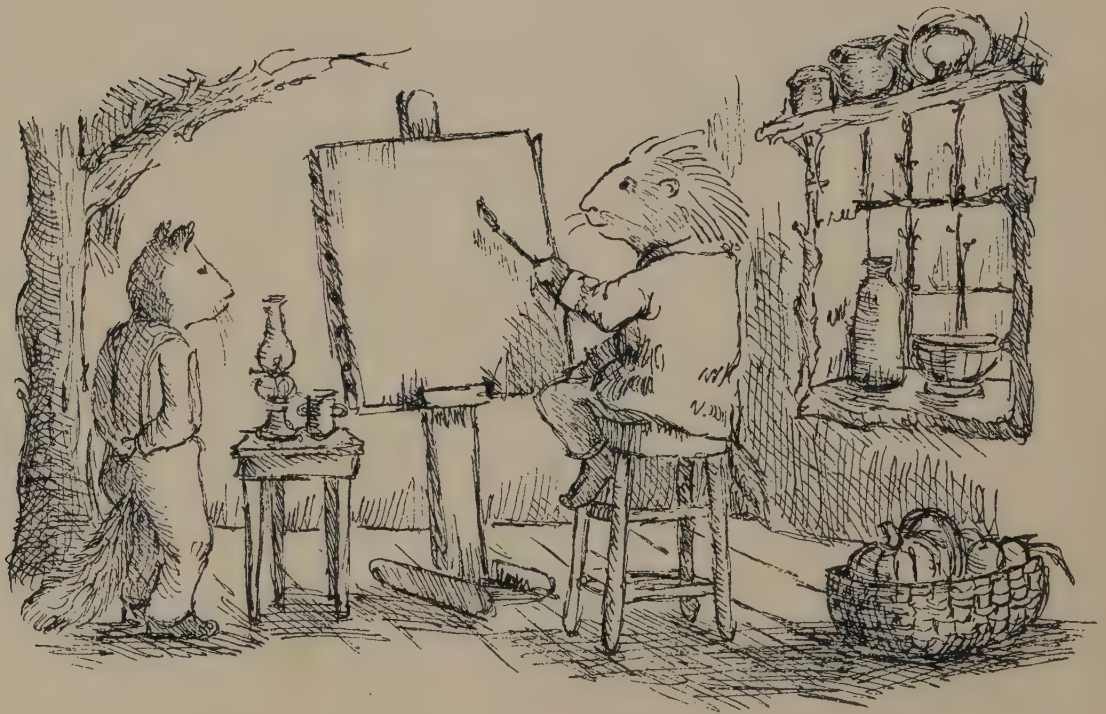
Porcupine's art supplies grew heavy after he carried them for a while. So he sat down and rested. Then he drank from the cool brook. Squirrel came by and sat down beside him.

“What are you doing with all that stuff?” asked Squirrel.

“I’m looking for a place to paint,” said Porcupine.

“You can paint at my place,” said Squirrel. “I’ve got plenty of room.”

Porcupine went to Squirrel’s place. He set up his paints and began to work. “That looks like fun,” said Squirrel. “Can I try it?”



Porcupine really didn't like the idea of Squirrel using his paints and brushes. But Squirrel had been kind enough to let him use his place, so Porcupine let Squirrel use his paints. "What should I paint?" asked Squirrel.

"Anything you want to paint," said Porcupine.

"I'll paint *you*," said Squirrel. When Squirrel finally finished, Porcupine asked if he could see the painting.

"No, I don't like it," said Squirrel. "But the next one will be better."

Porcupine decided that he'd better leave before Squirrel used up all of his paints. "I have to go," said Porcupine.

"That's too bad," said Squirrel. "I was just getting started."

"That's what I was afraid of," said Porcupine as he went out the door.

The forest path with the new fallen leaves looked as if an Oriental carpet had been set out. Porcupine walked along the path, stopping often to pick up a leaf or look at a tree. On one tree he saw a sign. It read: *Place for Rent.*

Porcupine knocked on the door. "Come in," said Mrs. Rabbit.

"I'd like to rent a place," said Porcupine.

Mrs. Rabbit looked at Porcupine's art supplies. "Are you an artist?" she asked.

"Yes," said Porcupine.

"How nice," said Mrs. Rabbit. "I'm sure you won't mind painting me and my family."

"I don't paint families," said Porcupine.





“Oh nonsense,” said Mrs. Rabbit, “Wait until you see mine! Children, children,” she called. Suddenly the room was filled with dozens of little rabbits.

“I don’t have enough paint and paper to paint your family,” said Porcupine. “Good day, Mrs. Rabbit.”

Then Porcupine walked to a quiet place in the woods and began to paint. He wasn't there too long when Crow joined him.

"What are you painting?" asked Crow.

"The mossy rock," said Porcupine.

"It doesn't look right," said Crow.

"*What* doesn't look right?" asked Porcupine.

"What you painted doesn't look right," said Crow.

"Why?" asked Porcupine.



“Because you made the mossy rock look like moldy bread,” said Crow.

Porcupine was insulted! He packed up his supplies. “When I want your opinion I’ll ask for it,” he said as he left.

After some more looking, he stopped and painted a sign. It read: *NEEDED: A PLACE TO PAINT.*

Deer Mouse came by and read the sign. “You look unhappy,” said Deer Mouse.

“I *am* unhappy,” said Porcupine.

“Why?” asked Deer Mouse.

“I have no place to paint,” said Porcupine.

“Is that all?” said Deer Mouse. “You can paint at my place.”

So Porcupine went with Deer Mouse. He settled himself quickly and began to work. "What are you doing?" asked Deer Mouse.

"I'm mixing my colors," said Porcupine.

"Why?" asked Deer Mouse.

"So that I can get more colors," said Porcupine.

"How come you paint with your left hand?" asked Deer Mouse.

"Because I'm left-handed," said Porcupine.

"What are you going to paint?" asked Deer Mouse.

"Nothing," said Porcupine.

"Why?" asked Deer Mouse.

"Because I'm so busy answering questions," said Porcupine. "Good-bye!"

"If you're so fussy get your *own* place!" shouted Deer Mouse.

"I think I will," said Porcupine.

Porcupine searched around and found a pile of old windows. He used them to build his own studio.

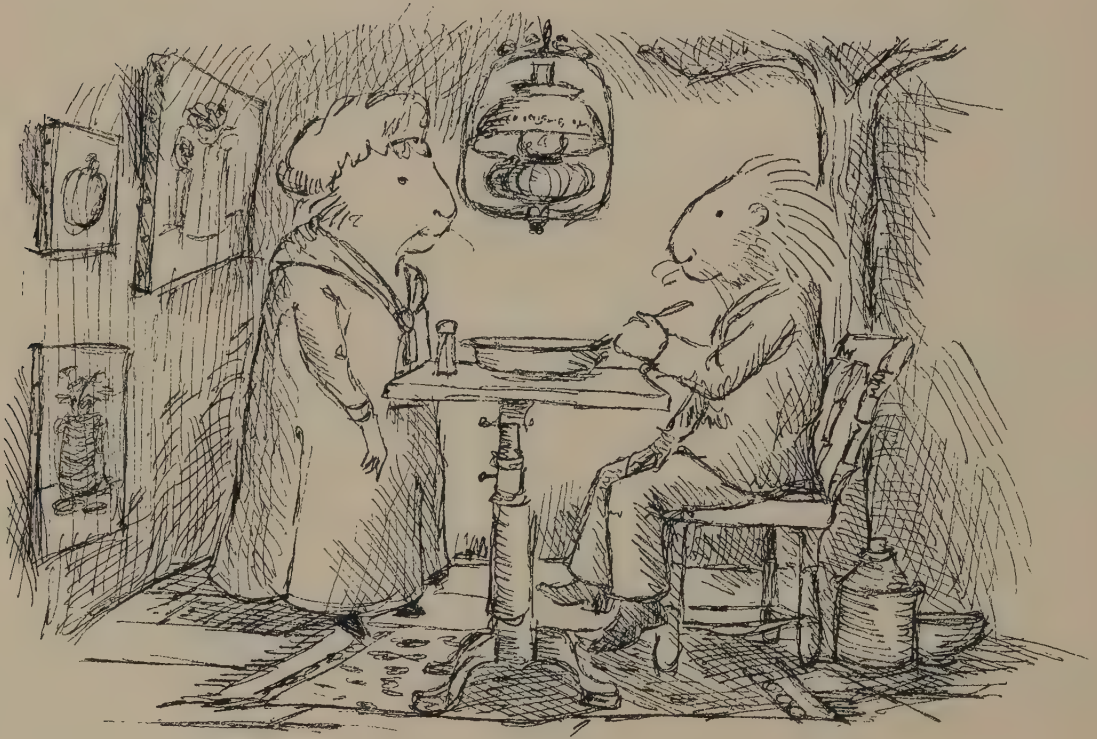




It was a good place. Porcupine could see the meadow, the pond, and the changing sky from it. Porcupine painted lots of pictures.

One day he had an exhibition of his pictures and everyone came. His mother came too, and she brought him a big bowl of soup. Porcupine was happy to see his mother, and he was happy she brought him soup. "I like your soup," said Porcupine.

"I like your paintings," said Porcupine's mother.





Porcupine gave his mother a painting, and she hung it in the kitchen, her favorite room.

## **Woodchuck Plans a Garden**

The stove glowed red and the kettle hissed. Outside, the wind pushed the snow upward as if to send it back to where it came from. Icicles clung to the roof and the windows were curtained with frost.

Woodchuck and Muskrat warmed themselves by the stove. They told each other stories and passed the winter days together. At night, flickering lamps made all things disappear and reappear like visitors from shadowy places. Woodchuck looked into the shadows and snuggled deeper into the patchwork quilt around him.

While Muskrat worked at the stove mixing his own blend of hot chocolate, Woodchuck entertained himself with thoughts of spring.





“Would you like some chocolate?” asked Muskrat. Woodchuck didn’t answer. He was deep into springtime thoughts.

Muskrat carried the kettle to Woodchuck. “Don’t you want any hot chocolate?” he asked, tapping a ladle against the kettle.

Woodchuck responded as if waking from a sleep. His face half-buried in the quilt, he mumbled, “Shellow sheens un breen sheens.”

“I can’t understand a word you’re saying,” said Muskrat. “But I’m having my hot chocolate now before it gets cold.”

Woodchuck freed himself from the quilt and joined Muskrat at the table.

“What was all that mumbling about?” asked Muskrat.

“I was thinking about the garden I was going to plant in the spring,” said Woodchuck.

“Good idea,” said Muskrat.

“I’m going to have yellow beans and green beans,” said Woodchuck.

“That sounds very good,” said Muskrat. He poured the hot chocolate and placed a spoonful of whipped cream into each cup.

“No more taking chances in the farmer’s garden,” said Woodchuck.

“Yes, that can be dangerous,” said Muskrat. “That’s why I always plant my own garden.”



“You sure know how to make good chocolate,” said Woodchuck, sipping it slowly, trying to make it last. When he finished, he held out his cup for more.

Muskrat filled the cup again, and listened to Woodchuck talk about the garden he was going to plant in the spring.



At winter's end, when all the snow was gone, Muskrat went out into his garden. He made mud tracks along the brick path. The ground was wet from the winter's thaw. When the days got warmer and the muddy footprints disappeared, Muskrat ordered seeds from the store.

One day Muskrat saw Woodchuck at the pond. "How is your garden coming?" asked Muskrat.



"I'm still planning it," said Woodchuck. He tossed a pebble into the pond.

Muskrat worked hard getting his garden ready. He mixed the fertilizer and spread it around evenly. Woodchuck came by and watched Muskrat work. He watched as Muskrat filled the wheelbarrow with stones and weeds.

"Did you start your garden?" asked Muskrat.

"I haven't found the right spot yet," said Woodchuck.

"You'd better find it soon," said Muskrat.

The days got longer. Muskrat planted the seeds in the garden. Tulips bloomed along the brick path. Summer came. Woodchuck still hadn't planted a garden.



Every morning before the last star disappeared, Muskrat was out in his garden, weeding, watering, and keeping the bugs away.

When Muskrat saw Woodchuck again and heard that he still hadn't planted a garden, he said, "It's too late now!"

Woodchuck shrugged and said, "Oh well, I'll just go to the farmer's."

The way to the farmer's was overgrown with prickly vines that stretched over and beyond the stone walls on either side of the path. The barnyard was empty, and the only sound was the squeaking of the rusting old weather-vane. All Woodchuck could find were weeds where the garden had been.

"Oh no!" he cried. "The garden is gone!"

"Oh yes!" said an old rabbit who was resting against a fence post. "No garden. The farmer's moved away."



Woodchuck began to worry, and the more he worried, the hungrier he got. Woodchuck's grumbling stomach kept him awake all night. He was so hungry it was hard to think. But he did, and he got an idea. Woodchuck went to visit Muskrat.

"I've just been to the farmer's," said Woodchuck.

"How are things there?" asked Muskrat.

"He has beets the size of melons, and just as sweet," said Woodchuck.

"That's nice," said Muskrat.

"But I'll bet yours are better," said Woodchuck. His stomach grumbled loudly.

"What was that noise?" asked Muskrat.

"What noise?" said Woodchuck.



"That noise from your stomach!" said Muskrat.

"Oh, it must be the farmer's beets," said Woodchuck.

"That's too bad," said Muskrat. "I was going to offer you some of mine."

"I'll bet your beets won't make my stomach grumble," said Woodchuck.

Muskrat looked at Woodchuck awhile. "Try one," he said.



Woodchuck ate the beet in a hurry. "You sure ate that fast," said Muskrat.

"That's because your beets are even better than the farmer's," said Woodchuck.

"Have another," said Muskrat. Woodchuck ate another beet. Woodchuck's stomach stopped grumbling.

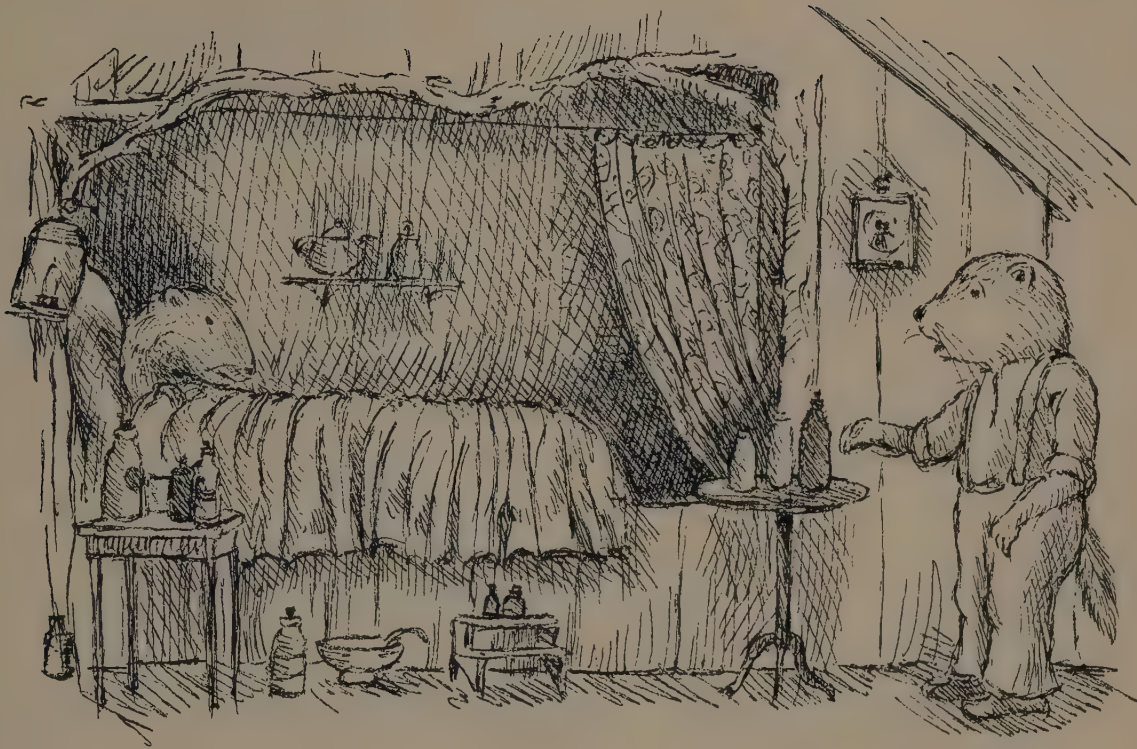
"See?" he said. "I told you your beets wouldn't make my stomach grumble. They're delicious. Thank you very much."

"In a few days my beans will be sprouting," said Muskrat. "I wonder if they will be better than the farmer's also."

"I suppose I can always test them," said Woodchuck. He thanked Muskrat once again and left.

A few days later, toward the end of the summer, the beans came out. Muskrat went into the house and waited for Woodchuck.

Soon Woodchuck came to the garden. And when he didn't find Muskrat there, he went to the house.



Muskrat was in bed and there were medicine bottles all over.

“What’s the matter?” asked Woodchuck.

Muskrat moaned, “I don’t feel well, and my garden needs taking care of.”

“I’ll take care of it,” said Woodchuck.

“You’ll have to weed it, water it, and keep the bugs away,” said Muskrat.

“Don’t you worry,” said Woodchuck. “I’ll take good care of it.”

Woodchuck went into the garden and began to work. He groaned as he pulled the weeds, and he fell over the watering can while chasing a bug away. “Gardening isn’t easy,” he said.



But Woodchuck kept his promise and worked hard all the rest of the week.



Finally it was time to pick all the vegetables. Muskrat joined Woodchuck in the garden. "I'm feeling well again," said Muskrat. Together they gathered the vegetables.

Muskrat made vegetable stew. "This is the best stew I've ever eaten," said Woodchuck.

"Thanks to your help," said Muskrat. After dinner, Muskrat and Woodchuck watched the sun set and sipped lemonade.

"I have something to tell you," said Woodchuck. "There wasn't any farmer's garden this year."

"I know," said Muskrat. "And I have something to tell you. I was never sick."

Muskrat and Woodchuck laughed together. The sun was gone. Night shadows came and settled in their places.

Woodchuck looked into the darkness. "You'll see," he said. "Next year I'll plant my own garden."

"I know it will be a good one," said Muskrat. And he poured another glass of lemonade.

A crescent moon appeared behind threadbare clouds. "It will be a very nice garden," said Woodchuck dreamily, and he fell asleep.























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